

# GROWING UP BETWEEN CULTURES: LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL IDENTITY AMONG MALTESE YOUTH AND THEIR ETHNIC COUNTERPARTS IN AUSTRALIA

JOE GRIXTI

**Abstract** – *The paper explores how young people's cultural identities are being increasingly redefined in complex linguistic and performative relation to trans-cultural experiences. It first considers the situation of young people of Maltese origin whose parents settled in Australia after the Second World War, and critiques the suggestion that these youths' educational performance and access to professional level employment may have been negatively affected by their alleged loss of 'mother tongue', ethnic identity and cultural heritage. The paper challenges this perception by outlining the complex ways in which young people growing up in Malta itself (the 'home' or 'mother' country) perceive, construct and perform their linguistic and cultural identities. It argues that young Maltese people's performative and linguistic constructions of their cultural identities provide a striking example of 'glocal' hybridity, and that, irrespective of whether they choose to claim Maltese or English or a combination of the two as the primary marker of their cultural identity, this hybridity is experienced as a positive performance and expression of selfhood.*

## Educational performance and migrant cultural identity

**T**he Maltese migrant community in Australia is a relatively small ethnic minority group, but it also constitutes a significant diasporic grouping, and is the largest Maltese community living outside of Malta. The number of people of Maltese ancestry living in Australia has been estimated at just over 152,000 (Australian Government [Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade], 2006). This is equivalent to almost 38% of the total population currently living in Malta itself (estimated at just over 404,000 in the 2005 Census [National Statistics Office, 2006, p. xviii]).

There is some evidence to suggest that the children of Maltese migrants in Australia tend to stop speaking Maltese at home and to even stop identifying themselves as 'Maltese' at a faster and earlier rate than appears to be the case among other (but by no means all) immigrant communities (see Borland, 2005; Klein 2005). This appears to have been particularly the case with the children of those who settled in Australia during the peak period of migration after the Second

World War. This phenomenon was at one stage identified as possibly leading to educational underperformance among second generation Maltese-Australians. According to Helen Borland, an academic researcher who was approached for advice on this matter by the elected representatives of the Maltese community in Victoria in the early 1990s, the community leaders were worried that 'in comparison with the Anglo-Australian majority and with most other minority groups of Australia's post-war mass migration, and indeed many more recent, but now established minority groups, such as those from south east Asia, young people from their community, the second generation, were "underperforming" ' (Borland, 2005, p. 110). The community leaders believed that a key factor contributing to this 'underperformance' was 'the lack of recognition and support for the Maltese language, culture and heritage both within the community itself and in the broader Australian society' (Borland, 2005, p. 110):

'Underperformance was defined according to specific educational attainment measures. School retention rates through the 1980s for second generation Maltese-background youth had been consistently below the state average. In the 1991 Census, approximately two-thirds of such youth in the 15-16 age group had already left school (Cauchi, 1990), well above the national average and higher than rates for most other ethnic minority groups. Concomitantly, a lower proportion of this group as compared to other ethnic minority groups had tertiary qualifications and, thus, fewer were gaining access to professional level employment.' (Borland, 2005, p. 110)

Borland (2005) acknowledges that 'success in schooling results from a complex coalescence of factors', but she insists that a key contributing factor in these young people's poor educational performance was the fact that they and their families felt alienated and unsupported in that 'their culture and language were not valued (in some cases not even recognised)' (p. 115). Citing findings from an extensive action-research project with Maltese background secondary school students and their parents which she and her colleagues conducted in Melbourne in the early 1990s (see Terry, Borland & Adams, 1993), Borland (2005) notes that a factor analysis of questionnaire responses 'revealed that by far the strongest factor to emerge was one associated with a sense of identity as Maltese' (p. 115), and that this was linked with attitudes to the use and understanding of the Maltese language. It is thus suggested that good educational performance among these young people was in some way dependent on their also 'having positive attitudes towards and enjoyment of using the Maltese language, ability to speak and understand Maltese and a preference to use Maltese at home' (Borland, 2005, p. 115). Among the reasons cited by Borland (2005) for making this connection

are the claims that 'identification with one's heritage language and culture has been shown to have benefits in terms of an individual's psychological wellbeing' (p. 120), and that 'there is a correlation between having a sense of ethnic identification, positive self-esteem and a lesser level of parent-child conflict in adolescence' (p. 115).

The extent to which the findings of the 1993 survey cited here by Borland can be seen as representative of the wider Maltese-Australian community (in other Australian states as well as in Victoria itself) has been questioned elsewhere because of their limited geographical focus (the survey focused on students and parents drawn from four schools within Melbourne's western region) (see Klein, 2005, p. 12). But perhaps more critically, there are a number of conceptual as well as empirical problems with this pattern of accounting for educational outcomes in terms ethnic identification. The logic here appears to at least partly derive from a conflation between concepts of psychological wellbeing, self-esteem and harmonious nuclear family relations on the one hand, with unexamined assumptions about the nature, patterns and trajectories of cultural, ethnic and diasporic identity on the other. The ascription of perceived educational underperformance among young Maltese-Australians to a loss of identification with ancestral ethnicity, especially as reflected in the loss of the 'mother tongue', thus appears to be based on a conviction that the loss of 'mother tongues' among emigrant cultures can 'signal the loss of some originary self' (Fortier, 2000; cited in Klein, 2005, p. 1). And the loss of this 'originary self' is in turn assumed to lead to ongoing identity confusion and failure to achieve educational potentials.

I want to argue that this concept of an 'originary self' essentialises identity formation and misrepresents the root causes of educational 'underperformance' because it fails to take account of the complex ways in which cultural identities are forged, particularly in increasingly globalised and hybrid contexts like those which prevail in Australia and in Malta. Indeed, the claim that educational underperformance is somehow linked to the abandoning of 'mother tongue' and a loss of affinity with the culture of the 'mother country' can be shown to be particularly problematic when one considers the complex and hybrid diversity of the cultural and linguistic situation in Malta itself. I shall be discussing that situation in some detail below, drawing on fieldwork which I conducted in Malta between 1998 and 2000, and again between 2002 and 2004. Before going there, however, I want first to briefly suggest alternative ways of approaching and contextualising the question of educational 'underperformance' among the Maltese-Australian youth referred to in Borland's study.

The patterns of educational and professional performance (or otherwise) among Maltese-Australian youth need to be understood in relation to the broader demographic and socio-economic contexts of the Maltese-Australian diasporic

experience. As was the case with migrants from other countries, there were significant differences between the educational backgrounds and career expectations of migrants who chose to settle in Australia during the period of peak migration between the late 1940s and early 1970s, and those who migrated there after the 1980s. These differences were a consequence of a complex mixture of forces, but were largely determined by ongoing changes in Australian migration policy to accommodate Australia's economic needs and development. The period of peak Maltese migration to Australia coincided with the Australian government's decision after the Second World War to institute a programme of mass migration to increase Australia's population in order to facilitate the post-war reconstruction of the economy, especially the development of manufacturing. Migration was to provide the workers and consumers underpinning the new economy (Collins, 1991; Inglis, 2004). These patterns changed significantly as a consequence of changes in Australian immigration policies in the 1980s, which led to a more systematic encouragement of skilled migration, and a consequent increase in the educational qualifications and professional expectations of most new migrants (see Colic-Peisker, 2002). Indeed, it can be argued that the changing patterns in the educational backgrounds of settling Maltese migrants are reflected in the educational performances of their children and grandchildren. Longitudinal studies of education and employment patterns among Maltese-Australians since the peak period of migration in the mid-1950s and 1960s indicate that, while first and second generation Maltese-Australians did indeed tend to drop out of school early, these patterns appeared to have started to change in the 1990s, when higher proportions of girls as well as boys of Maltese origin (third generation or children of more recent migrants) were choosing to stay on in school and pursuing tertiary studies (see Cauchi, 1999, pp. 36-41).

The argument that the loss of 'mother tongue' among Maltese migrants can be linked to educational underperformance becomes even more problematic when one considers the patterns of language use and language shift among a number of other immigrant communities. Australian Census data (see Clyne & Kipp, 1997a) actually indicate that there are other ethnic groups with substantially *higher* rates of language shift (from mother tongue to English) than those of Maltese origin, and these are groups who do not seem to have experienced the same patterns of educational 'underperformance' after migration to Australia. In their demographic analysis of trends in home language use in Australia, although Clyne & Kipp (1997b, pp. 470-471) do indeed list Maltese migrants as having a 'higher language shift' than a number of other migrant groups (e.g., Greeks, Italians, Chinese), their figures also identify a number of other communities (Dutch, German, Austrian, French) for whom the shift to English is actually higher and faster. There is no suggestion that the shift experienced by these other groups is in any way linked

to poor self-esteem and educational underperformance, or indeed that the slower shift of other ethnic groups is directly linked to high levels of self-esteem and high educational achievement.

Interestingly, Clyne & Kipp (1997b) argue that it is ‘cultural distance’ which determines whether or not first and second generation migrants will keep speaking their ‘mother tongue’, so that members of ethnic groups coming from cultural contexts similar to those of the Anglo-Australian majority are argued to be likely to shift to using English in the home much earlier than those coming from other cultural contexts. According to Clyne & Kipp (1997b),

‘those from predominantly Islamic or Eastern Orthodox cultures (Greek, Lebanese, Macedonian, Turkish) are likely to maintain their languages at home rather than other groups from Europe. Groups from northern, central and eastern Europe tend to shift to English the most. Those from Asian countries, especially Chinese-speaking ones, tend to display a low or fairly low language shift.’ (p. 459)

The notions of ‘cultural distance’ or ‘cultural affinity’ are worth pausing over. One source of perceived ‘affinity’ with the Anglo-Australian cultural environment for Maltese migrants arriving after the Second World War presumably grew out of Malta’s status as a British colony. But it can be as convincingly argued that there were also very strong affinities with other ethnic groupings, especially those with a Mediterranean background. It bears noting, for instance, that though Maltese patterns of language retention are similar to those of immigrants of northern European origin, studies like those of Borland (2005) (and the community leaders she quotes) choose to compare the Maltese community with southern European groups (especially Italians and Greeks) because of perceived cultural affinities with those Mediterranean background groups. There is in fact an inevitable element of ambivalence and ambiguity in the ways members of the Maltese diaspora in Australia understand and define their cultural identities and affinities. As I argue in the next section, these ambiguities have their sources in the very unique and hybridised nature of Maltese cultural and linguistic identity in the ‘home country’ itself.

## **Cultural and linguistic hybridity in Malta**

The overwhelming majority of Malta’s population speak Maltese as their first language – over 96% according to some estimates (Borg, Mifsud & Sciriha, 1992; Sciriha & Vassallo, 2001). Exact quantification is however problematic because of the variety of ways in which individual speakers will often interlace Maltese

with English, and because the use of either language is usually context-driven. Though the Maltese language ‘has long been held to be the crux of Maltese identity and is often held to be the main differentiating mark of ethnic identity’ (Cassar, 2001, p. 257), it has also had to survive centuries of colonial domination during which it was ‘constrained to the “low” domains of the home and village life’ (Borland, 2005, p. 113). As a spoken language, Maltese has a very long and complex history, but writing in Maltese only started to become relatively widespread in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and it was only standardised and codified in the 1920s. It did not have any official status till 1934 (when it replaced Italian as the language of the courts), and was only officially identified as the country’s national language after independence from Britain in 1964. Malta’s Constitution now lists Maltese and English as the country’s two official languages, and the government’s policy is to make Malta truly bilingual – so that, for instance, all laws have to be framed in the two languages, though the Maltese text will prevail over the English in the case of conflict (see Article 5, *Constitution of Malta*<sup>1</sup>). Maltese is now widely used in most sectors of public life, including parliament, the church, radio and television, as well as in general conversation.

But though the Maltese language is now officially and firmly established as an essential marker of Maltese national identity, there is also widespread competition from English because of its importance as a language of wider communication. English language newspapers, books and magazines are sold everywhere, English language films dominate local cinemas, and local theatre productions in English are at least as frequent as those in Maltese. Most of the inhabitants are bilingual, but to varying degrees of competence, and many do not feel equally confident in both languages. Because of historical and geographic links with Italy, as well as access to Italian television transmissions since the late 1950s, Italian is also widely understood and (to varying degrees) spoken by large sections of the population.

English was introduced in Malta during the British colonial period (1800-1964), but it did not start to achieve the important position which it enjoys today until the second quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. An 1879 British commission of enquiry into the position of the English language in Malta, for example, reported that though English was in growing demand because of commercial conditions, its teaching was ‘given little or no attention’ in primary schools, and ‘its use was forbidden in 13 of 14 classes of the Lyceum (the only secondary school) and 17 of 18 classes in the university’ (Camilleri, 1996, p. 86). One cause of this resistance to the introduction of English was the firmly established status of Italian as the language of the educated and professional classes. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early years of the twentieth, Italian remained the only formal language, while Maltese continued to be spoken by the local population. It was only after the Second World War (when the prestige of Italian was eroded because

it came to be seen as the language of the enemy) that English really began to play a major role in public institutional life and Maltese culture, coming to be seen by all echelons of Maltese society as the language of education and as a status symbol (Aquilina, 1978, p. 45). The emergence of English as a focal force in global communications and media technology during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, coupled with the massive growth of the tourist industry as a main source of Malta's national income after independence in 1964, have further consolidated the position of English in Malta as the useful international language. But the standing of Maltese as national language has also been strengthened – as evidenced by its acceptance as an official language of the European Union in 2004. According to Brincat (2005), 'the vitality of the local language and political insistence on national identity have helped Maltese to encroach on areas where fifty years ago English dominated (even ATMs and Google offer an option)' (Bilingualism and Language Switching section, para. 1).

While the overwhelming majority of Maltese children acquire Maltese as their first language, there is also a small but influential number of people who prefer to use English as a first language with their children. Up to relatively recently, these latter groups were mostly concentrated in areas where many British people lived during the colonial era 'and probably served as models for local families aspiring to upward social mobility' (Camilleri, 1996, p. 89). Members of this group often use both Maltese and English interchangeably at home, but there are many for whom Maltese is only acquired through formal teaching at school and through contact with speakers of Maltese outside the home. This is in marked contrast to the majority, for whom it is English that is only acquired at school, and increasingly also through exposure to English language media and contact with tourists. These different patterns of language acquisition and use, and the different language environments in which Maltese children grow (with either Maltese or English or a hybrid mixture of the two serving as primary language) have a significant impact on the ways in which young Maltese people understand and define their national and cultural identities.

## **Glocality and diasporic hybridity among Maltese youth**

The following discussion is based on fieldwork which I conducted in Malta in 1998-2000 and 2002-2004 as part of two qualitative research projects commissioned by the national Broadcasting Authority (see Grixti, 2000, 2004). The projects examined the significance of the media in the formation and enculturation of young Maltese consumers, and included a series of focus-group interviews with a total of 500 children and young adults aged between 5 and 25.

The interviewees came from different socio-economic and regional backgrounds, and the interviews were conducted in a variety of locations, including university, a range of schools, private homes, and different work places. The interviews were held either in Maltese or in English, depending on which language the participants were most comfortable with. In some cases, because of the mixed nature of the group, a mixture of both languages was used.

In the course of my research, I was frequently struck by young Maltese people's tendency to associate being young, forward-looking, modern, technologically advanced and enlightened with being in tune with what comes from overseas – or more specifically, with what comes from Western Europe, Britain and the United States, particularly through the media. Being 'old fashioned' and backward tended to be linked with an inability to move beyond the more obviously indigenous and traditional (especially as embodied in local party politics and religion). For those coming from the more upwardly mobile professional classes, the speaking of English often became an assertion of alignment with this wider global context. When asked about their television viewing preferences, for instance, interviewees from higher socio-economic backgrounds often insisted that they make a point of not watching local TV programmes, or that they only do so to laugh at their limitations and poor quality.

The fact that many of these teenagers spoke exclusively in English, and in some cases even proudly drew attention to the fact that they did not speak or understand Maltese, suggested that the attitude is primarily perceived as an assertion of superior social status. Speaking in English, one teenager told me that he intensely disliked Maltese soap operas *'because for me, in English a soap opera is OK, but Maltese is a rough language and I don't like it, on soap operas. I don't think it's right, u!'* [*'u'* at the end of a sentence is the Maltese equivalent of 'eh' or 'you know']. These attitudes are probably reinforced by the fact that, even though local soap operas are widely perceived as (at times 'embarrassingly') less professional and polished than their overseas counterparts, they are immensely popular with young people coming from lower educational and socio-economic backgrounds – primarily because they are in Maltese, are easily understood, and usually deal with local issues.

Malta's size and its geographical insularity have at various points in its history been seen as limiting and constricting. In some cases, faster and easier access to images and ideas from overseas have further accentuated young people's dissatisfaction with local limitations and nurtured a stronger longing for the foreign. But new technologies have also made it possible for many young people to also think of themselves as belonging to a larger global community, perceiving Malta's insularity as less constricting – or else as no longer being of relevance. The Internet plays a key role in this, in that it allows young people to actively



participate in global youth communities without leaving home. In this context, the advantages of easy communication on a global scale have made the embracing of English doubly attractive.

The implications of these developments to young people's understanding of their national and cultural identities were well captured for me when one young man told me that he considered himself '*more European than Maltese*' because his family always spoke English and because he has been '*influenced too much by foreign culture, foreign attitudes, foreign ways of life.*' Another young man described himself as '*Maltese by nationality, but not Maltese by culture*' because he speaks English whenever possible and does not indulge in '*traditional customs like going to village band clubs or dancing the traditional folk dance.*' These young men appear to be locating their own cultural identity on what they perceive as the enlightened end of a continuum between two essentialised positions. On the one extreme stands the indigenous past, associated in their minds with irrelevant local traditions and the Maltese language; on the other stands the future, accessed through English and vaguely epitomised as 'Western society', home of new technology and forward looking ideas. This is a 'society' which these young people have come to know primarily through the media of film, television, books, magazines and the Internet.

There is a curious process of self-identification and identity formation reflected in these attitudes. Drawing on Anderson's (1991) *Imagined Communities*, Hannerz (1996, p. 21) has noted how shared commonality within a nation is usually paralleled by a strong sense of cultural and linguistic discontinuity with respect to outsider-nations. All identity construction, as Kennedy & Danks (2001) put it, 'requires the summoning of difference, the relativization of the self as against the "other" imagined as separate, outside – and perhaps also as marginal, inferior and dangerous' (p. 3). These patterns certainly apply to the majority of young Maltese people who communicate primarily (and in some cases exclusively) in Maltese, and for whom the Maltese language is a key marker of their national identity. For this group, the use of Maltese is 'perhaps the ultimate marker of inclusion and exclusion' (Mitchell, 2002, p. 64) and an assertion of local and group cohesion. Interestingly, in some cases these essentialised distinctions between the local and the foreign have also become entangled with perceptions and performances of gender identity. Describing his research in a comprehensive boys' school in Malta, Portelli (2006) argues that 'underlying many boys' preferences for the national language rather than English, and their deriding their peers who speak English, is their investment in a version of masculinity which is aligned with an outward display of national pride' (p. 426).

But in the case of the smaller albeit significant number of young people for whom English is the first language, or who insist on identifying themselves as

primarily English-speaking, what seems to be happening is that it is the traditional and indigenous which have been designated as the 'other'. The choice of English as the main or only language of communication has become their means of distancing themselves from local limitations and insularity, and of embracing a more 'global' identity by aligning themselves with (and appropriating some of the attributes of) the 'outsider/foreigner'.

It bears stressing that these young people's perceptions of the local and the foreign as essentialised and distinct entities are in reality quite different from the realities of their lived experiences. Malta's cultural history, the Maltese language and the Maltese media landscape have all been shaped by complex interminglings of local and foreign influences. In this context, young Maltese people's concern about being identified as predominantly 'European' rather than 'Maltese' (or vice-versa) amount to performative expressions of post-colonial hybridity. Thus, the English habitually spoken by those young people who want to align themselves with the non-indigenous is distinctive and unique to Malta, representing a striking example of how foreign influences are both incorporated and transformed in specific communities. English here has become indigenised, put to local use, and given a local accent, with many local variations and idiosyncrasies. This phenomenon is not unique to Malta, of course, in that the English spoken in Malta is one of the many local (or 'nativised') varieties of English which 'take place characteristically in ex-colonial territories where forms of the ex-colonial language have evolved and developed in their own right independently of their metropolitan sources' (Norrish, 1997, p. 1).

In this complex bilingual context, both Maltese and the English spoken in Malta have undergone significant changes. English loan-words in Maltese have become very widespread, language switching and mixing is very common, and there has also been a growing tendency for the use of hybrid forms of Maltese and English. English in Malta is often spoken with an intonation and accent which have evolved through contact and regular interaction with the patterns of spoken Maltese. It will tend to include transliterations of Maltese words and idiomatic expressions which only make sense if one knows the Maltese original – as in *'I'm going to cut now'* in a telephone conversation, meaning *'I'm going to hang up'* (Brincat, 2005). Maltese words or expressions often punctuate sentences in English, and vice versa. For example, in the course of a conversation in English: *'I don't think it's right, u!'* (cited above) or *'I love shopping, ji@ifieri'* [*'I mean'*]; and, in the course of one in Maltese: *'mhux worth it li ti $\Omega$ wwe@'* [*'it's not worth getting married'*], or *'Round drinks @ieli jqumli fourteen pounds'* [*'a round of drinks sometimes costs me fourteen pounds'*], or *'g 'andna s-satellite, ji@ifieri, g 'andna xi five hundred channels'* [*'we have satellite, I mean, we have some five hundred channels'*] (Grixti, 2000, p. 7; 2004, pp. 55, 28-29).

Whether they choose to claim Maltese or English or a combination of the two as the primary marker of their cultural identity, young Maltese people's performative and linguistic constructions of their own identities are in this sense always and inevitably hybridised. Because these identities, like the language(s) in which they are constructed and performed, draw on different cultural traditions at the same time, they have also become expressions of 'those complicated cross-overs and cultural mixes which are increasingly common in a globalised world' (Hall, 1992, p. 310). If 'diaspora' is understood metaphorically (see Spencer & Wollman, 2002, p. 165), then it is diasporic identities which these young people are embracing – identities which (to borrow Brah's definition) are 'networks of transactional identifications encompassing "imagined" and "encountered" communities' (1996, p. 196).

As we have seen, for Maltese youth, the imagined communities of 'the global' and 'the local' are often associated with essentialised perceptions of language – where English becomes the conduit to a technologically advanced and forward-looking world, while Maltese remains the language of tradition and the indigenous past. But these perceptions are in reality very different from young people's experiences of 'the global' and 'the local' as actually encountered and performed through the entwined varieties of Maltese and English spoken in Malta. In this sense, young Maltese people's attitudes to language are useful reminders of the fact that the imagined and encountered communities of 'the global' and 'the local' are also performative productions in their own right (see Hörschelmann & Schäfer, 2005, p. 224). They too are 'always in process' in that they are to varying degrees created or denied in social and linguistic performances of cultural identity.

## **Growing up between cultures**

I started by referring to the concern expressed by Maltese community leaders in Australia that the loss of 'mother tongue' and of a sense of an 'originary self' by second generation Maltese-Australian youth may be responsible for what they perceive as identity confusion and a consequent tendency to underachieve in education. The evidence I have presented about the robustly hybrid ways in which these youths' ethnic counterparts in the 'home' country construct their cultural identities suggests that these concerns may be misplaced. Attitudes to language and cultural identity in the Maltese Islands have always been characterised by cultural hybridity, but this situation has certainly never been seriously identified as a cause of educational underperformance among youth there. In other words, the attitudes of young Maltese-Australians to their

‘mother tongue’ and ‘mother country’ are different from those of other migrant communities because the linguistic and cultural influences underscoring the formation of the Maltese ‘originary self’ were very different to start with. It is thus reasonable to argue (as Borland does) that there is a strong link between language and cultural identity. It is also reasonable to argue that a strong sense of cultural identity and high self-esteem are positively linked with good educational performance. But it does not follow that on this basis one can automatically make a link between loss of ‘mother tongue’ and educational underperformance. As I have shown in this paper, the multidimensional complexities of the relationship between language use and cultural identity (particularly in the Maltese experience) cannot be reduced to such straight forward equations.

In this perspective, identity needs to be understood as ‘a “production”, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation’ (Hall, 1997, p. 51). It is (in Judith Butler’s terms) ‘performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results’ (Butler, 1990, p. 25). Children and young people with a migration background have frequently been described as ‘growing up between cultures’, or as ‘third culture kids’ (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001), constantly having to negotiate family norms and traditions with the surrounding society’s norms and values. What I have argued in this paper is that the experience of ‘growing up between cultures’ is as true of young people growing up in Malta itself as it is of those growing up as children of Maltese migrants in Australia. In this sense, it is in the interactions between cultures (rather than in their differences) that we should be locating the key influences on how young people construct their cultural identities and on how they choose to define and embrace different ethnic and cultural affiliations. In contemporary Malta as well as in Australia, the media play a crucial role in this, in that they have helped to bring about a situation where young people’s cultural experiences are constantly overlapping. In this sense, the local and the global have become deeply intertwined, paradoxically reinforcing as they symbiotically transform each other. In this ‘glocalised’ context, as Anthony Giddens has argued, life experiences are no longer exclusively defined and confined by once-powerful solidarities such as locality, class, church, family, gender and occupation. Rather, daily life has increasingly become reconstituted in terms of ‘the dialectical interplay of the local and the global’ (Giddens, 1991, p. 5), and individuals increasingly negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options. It is in the light of this perspective that potential links between patterns of educational performance and cultural identity can be more profitably explored and understood.

## Note

1. The English version of the Constitution can be viewed at [http://docs.justice.gov.mt/1om/legislation/english/leg/vol\\_1/chapt0.pdf](http://docs.justice.gov.mt/1om/legislation/english/leg/vol_1/chapt0.pdf)

---

**Joe Grixti** is senior lecturer in the media studies programme and coordinator of undergraduate courses in the School of Social and Cultural Studies at the Auckland Campus of Massey University, New Zealand. Dr Grixti lectured at the Queensland University of Technology in Australia and at the University of Malta before his move to New Zealand, and is a graduate of the Universities of Oxford and Bristol. His current research interests and recent publications are in interdisciplinary approaches to personal and cultural identity. His e-mail address is: [j.a.grixti@massey.ac.nz](mailto:j.a.grixti@massey.ac.nz)

## References

- Anderson, B. (1991) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). London: Verso.
- Aquilina, J. (1978) Languages in contact in Malta, *Journal of Maltese Studies*, Vol. 12, pp. 45-62.
- Australian Government (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) (2006) *Malta Country Brief*. Available online at: [http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/malta/malta\\_brief.html](http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/malta/malta_brief.html)
- Borg, A., Mifsud, M., & Scirihha, L. (1992) *The Position of Maltese in Malta*. Paper presented at the Meeting for Experts on Language Planning, Council of Europe, 18-21 July, Malta.
- Borland, H. (2005) Heritage languages and community identity building: the case of a language of lesser status, *The International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, Vol. 8(2&3), pp. 109-123.
- Brah, A. (1996) *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. London: Routledge.
- Brincat, J. M. (2005) Maltese – an unusual formula, *MED Magazine*, Issue 27 (February). Available online at: <http://www.macmillandictionary.com/MED-magazine/February2005/27-LI-Maltese.htm>
- Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge.
- Camilleri, A. (1996) Language values and identities: code switching in secondary classrooms in Malta, *Linguistics and Education*, Vol. 8(1), pp. 85-103.
- Cassar, C. (2001) Malta: language, literacy and identity in a Mediterranean island society, *National Identities*, Vol. 3(3), pp. 257-275.
- Cauchi, M. (1999) Education and Maltese language usage among persons of Maltese background. In M. Cauchi, H. Borland & R. Adams (eds.) *Maltese Background Youth*. Melbourne: Europe-Australia Institute, Victoria University of Technology. Available online at: <http://www.maltamigration.com/settlement/education/mby/usage1.shtml?s=CAB469A7-CAB4530D-7D6A26104922-7B6A>

- Clyne, M., & Kipp, S. (1997a) Language maintenance and language shift: community languages in Australia, *People and Place*, Vol. 5(4), pp. 19-27.
- Clyne, M., & Kipp, S. (1997b) Trends and changes in home language use and shift in Australia, 1986-1996, *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, Vol. 18(6), pp. 451-473.
- Colic-Peisker, V. (2002) Croats in Western Australia: migration, language and class, *Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 38(2), pp. 149-166.
- Collins, J. (1991) *Migrant Hands in a Distant Land: Australia's Post-War Immigration* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Sydney: Pluto Press.
- Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Grixti, J. (2000) *Young People and the Broadcasting Media: The Maltese Experience*. Malta: Broadcasting Authority.
- Grixti, J. (2004) *Broadcasting and the Young Adult Consumer: Local and Global Media Influences on Maltese Youth Culture*. Malta: Broadcasting Authority.
- Hall, S. (1992) The question of cultural identity. In S. Hall, D. Held & T. McGrew (eds.) *Modernity and Its Futures*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Hall, S. (1997) Cultural identity and diaspora. In K. Woodward (ed.) *Identity and Difference*. London: Sage.
- Hannerz, U. (1996) *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places*. London: Routledge.
- Hörschelmann, K., & Schäfer, N. (2005) Performing the global through the local: globalisation and individualisation in spatial practices of young East Germans, *Children's Geographies*, Vol. 3(2), pp. 219-242.
- Inglis, C. (2004) Australia: educational changes and challenges in response to multiculturalism, globalization and transnationalism. In S. Luchtenberg (ed.) *Migration, Education and Change*. London: Routledge.
- Kennedy, P., & Danks, C. J. (2001) *Globalisation and National Identities: Crisis or Opportunity?* Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Klein, E. (2005) "Quite a Dilemma!" *Musical Performance and Debate Concerning the Usefulness of the Maltese Language in Australia*. Refereed Paper presented at the First International Small Island Cultures Conference, 7-10 February, Kagoshima University Centre for the Pacific Islands, Kagoshima University, Japan. Available online at: [www.sicri.org/assets/downloads/SICRI05\\_PDF/SICRI2005\\_Klein.pdf](http://www.sicri.org/assets/downloads/SICRI05_PDF/SICRI2005_Klein.pdf)
- Mitchell, J. P. (2002) *Ambivalent Europeans: Ritual, Memory and the Public Sphere in Malta*. London: Routledge.
- National Statistics Office (2006) *Census of Population and Housing 2005: Preliminary Report*. Malta: Author. Available online at: [http://www.nso.gov.mt/statdoc/document\\_view.aspx?id=1599&backurl=/themes/theme\\_page.aspx](http://www.nso.gov.mt/statdoc/document_view.aspx?id=1599&backurl=/themes/theme_page.aspx)
- Norrish, J. (1997) *english or English? Attitudes, local varieties and English language teaching, TESL-EJ*, Vol. 3(1), A-2. Available online at: <http://www-writing.berkeley.edu/TESL-EJ/ej09/a2.html>
- Pollock, D. C., & Van Reken, R. E. (2001) *Third Culture Kids: The Experience of Growing Up Among Worlds*. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

- Portelli, J. R. (2006) Language: an important signifier of masculinity in a bilingual context, *Gender and Education*, Vol. 18(4), pp. 413-430.
- Sciriha, L., & Vassallo, M. (2001) *Malta: A Linguistic Landscape*. Malta: University of Malta Press.
- Spencer, P., & Wollman, H. (2002) *Nationalism: A Critical Introduction*. London: Sage.
- Terry, L., Borland, H., & Adams, R. (1993) '*To Learn More than I Have...*': *The Educational Aspirations and Experiences of the Maltese in Melbourne*. Melbourne: Maltese Community Council of Victoria.